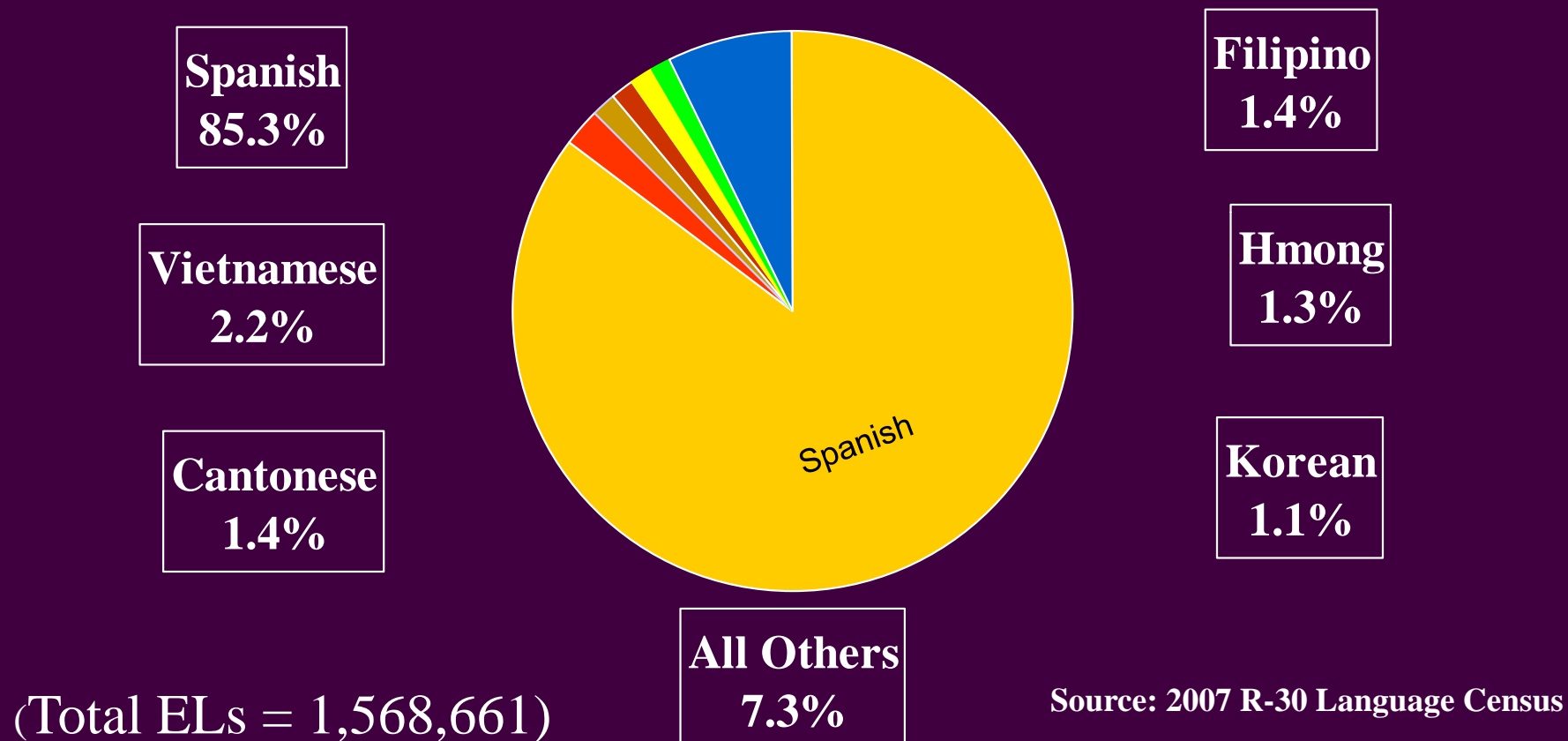


CA LEP Enrollment



- 25% of all students are Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Learner (EL) students.
- 43% of all students speak a language other than English in their homes (LEP/Fluent English Proficient (FEP)).
- 47% of all CA students in P-K to 5th grade are children of immigrants! (Urban Institute)

Languages Spoken by LEP Students in California



Language and Culture Issues in Foster Care

Presentation for the Blue Ribbon
Commission December 11, 2007

by Jennifer Rodriguez, Staff Attorney
Youth Law Center



Youth Law Center's Birth to Six Initiative

- Child welfare systems struggle to meet needs of young children with serious long term impacts.
- YLC partnering with SF, Fresno Counties
- First Phase: Focus groups with biological parents, foster parents, relative caregivers, department staff and youth to gather info on current policies and practices.
- Language and culture issues for children and parents major issue.



SF Focus Group Findings

- **Ethnicity** - belonging to a group that shares the same characteristics, such as country of origin, language, religion, ancestry and culture. Ethnicity is a matter of biological and historical fact and is not changed by the culture in which a person grows up.
- **Culture** - describes what people develop to enable them to adapt to their world, such as language, gestures, tools to enable them to survive and prosper, customs and traditions that define values and organize social interactions, religious beliefs and rituals, and dress, art, and music. Culture determines the practices and beliefs that become associated with an ethnic group and provides its distinctive identity.
- **Identity** - classified as an individual's personal identity, social identity or ethnic identity.
- Bottom line: Preserving what the child is FAMILIAR with



Impacts on Child

- Continuity and consistency in caregiver and basic needs particularly important for young children's brain development and mental health
- Current lack of planning or focus on care continuity and consistency.
- No focus on culture and language continuity



Cultural Misunderstandings

- Cultural misunderstandings impact removal, permanency, positive outcomes
- Caregivers and workers, attorney, court may not be culturally aware- may label cultural practices or stress as child having “issues”- i.e. co-sleeping, eating difficulties, not speaking, toileting



Placements

- Many children are placed in homes that do not speak their primary language, do not understand culture, and/or are outside of their home community
- Child's well being impacted- trauma of foster care and separation intensified with inconsistency (food, language, routine, environment).
- Over time, children lose connection to culture and language and lose guidance for understanding identity and adapting



Easing transitions

- Language differences can make communication between bio family and caregiver impossible
- Visitation occurs less frequently or not at all when placement is distant
- Reunification more difficult
- When child reunified- language, culture barriers between child and parent



Reunification- Issues for Parents

- Immigrant parents have added fear and intimidation of govt. “systems”- specifically court
- Navigating system particularly difficult- language barriers
- Immediate crisis and concerns need to be addressed in order to deal with reasons child in system
- Parents may feel pressured to leave children in foster care
- Engaging families and children difficult



Services and Interventions

- Lack of service providers that are bilingual/bicultural who will understand needs
- Parents may have less access to services- (visitation, parenting classes, drug treatment, employment)
- Culture effects way ppl view problems and respond, so interventions may not be effective
- Parents who lack legal status have difficulty taking time off work for visitation and services, and have special problems accessing supportive services or complying with case plan



Other issues

- Lack of visitation with extended family
- Later permanency more difficult
- Group homes
- Educational needs



What Can Agency do?

- Assess language and culture diversity of child and family population
- Recruit homes with language and culture in mind
- Cultural awareness training for staff and resource parents
- Child development training for staff and resource parents
- Ensure services meet language and cultural needs of parents and children



What Can Agency Do?

- Implement transition planning for removal and placement moves that is sensitive to language and culture
- Be prepared to give immigration advice and referrals- develop collaborative relationships with immigrant service providers
- Ensure that school placements address the language needs of the child
- Ensure that all notices are language accessible



What Can Agency Do?

- Require resource families to have relationship with bio parents
- Access to bilingual/bicultural svcs. for non-English speaking families
- Evaluate visitation policies and practices
- Provide support after reunification
- Make all efforts to keep child connected



What Can Court Do?

- Be Aware and Hold Accountable
- Ask the right questions
- Ensure court staff and attorneys are culturally and language proficient
- Parent and child court mentors
- Visitation monitoring



What Can Court Do?

- Help identify system issues
- Make all efforts to keep child connected
- Ensure child, resource families and bio families get supportive services
- Ensure all notices are language accessible
- Assist in facilitating transnational collaboration when necessary

